

# **“UNDERSTANDING HISTORY”**

**ANDREW ROTHSTEIN.**

**COMMUNIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN.  
SURREY DISTRICT.**

**20p.**

## **FOREWORD.**

***THIS LECTURE WAS DELIVERED AT A WEEK-END SCHOOL ORGANISED BY THE SURREY DISTRICT COMMITTEE OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY ON APRIL 1st 1978.***

***ALTHOUGH NOT INTENDED FOR PUBLICATION, IT WAS THOUGHT TO BE OF SOME USE AS AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SUBJECT.***

**A.R.**

## **RECOMMENDED READING**

1. The foundation statement of Marxist thinking on the subject is Marx's brief "Preface" to **A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy** (1859). It is available in the **Selected Works of Marx and Engels**.
2. Essential comments on it, particularly valuable in the present vast new flood of anti-Marxist rubbish, are three letters by Engels: in 1890, to J. Bloch and C. Schmidt; in 1894, to H. Starkenburg. They can be found in the **Selected Works** and also in the **Selected Correspondence of Marx and Engels**.
3. A witty, penetrating and too little known development of Marx' and Engels' views is Plekhanov's **In Defence of Materialism** (title of the Lawrence and Wishart edition; Progress Publishers, Moscow, title is **Development of the Monist Theory of History**).
4. Never out of date, so long as capitalism lasts on this earth, is Lenin's **Lecture on the State** (July 11, 1919). It was delivered to worker students. Available in his **Collected Works**, the three-volume **Selected Works**, a separate booklet **Lenin on Soviet Socialist Democracy**, etc.
5. For tying up theory with contemporary practice, the following are useful:
  - (a) Dutt, **Problems of Contemporary History** (1963), parts I, IV.
  - (b) Rothstein, **British Foreign Policy and its Critics** (1969)
6. For the history of Great Britain as a whole, in the light of Marxism, A. L. Morton, **People's History of England** (1965 revised edition).

## "UNDERSTANDING HISTORY"

Henry Ford, the millionaire owner of car factories in the USA and other countries, declared one day — it was in the summer of 1919, just after the first world war — "History is bunk". In itself, that majestic pronouncement may seem to tell you very little about history, but somewhat more about Henry Ford.

Yet if you remember that the first internal combustion engine had been invented only 30 years before, the building of big motorcar factories for capitalist investors less than 25, and Ford's own factory only 15 years before, that this whole period was one when capital exports to Asia, South America and Africa were rapidly expanding markets for cars, while the Great Powers were dividing up Africa among themselves: and that Henry Ford's millions in particular were made by a five-fold increase of production in his factories during the first world war — why, you can understand better both why Henry Ford, sitting on his huge bank account, could afford to make fun of everything except money making, and indeed why a phenomenon like Henry Ford could only appear in that particular moment of history.

However, it would be unfair to grant to Ford, that cultural ignoramus, any monopoly of the brilliant idea he brought forth at his libel action against the "Chicago Tribune". More learned men than he had said what amounted to much the same repudiation of any attempt to understand or explain history, but in more refined language.

Thus the English historian Froude had in 1894 called history "a child's box of letters with which we can spell out any word we please". Even before him, in the '80s, Augustine Birrell, an English University professor and later Cabinet Minister, had written of "that great dust-heap called history". A famous Italian philosopher who specialised in distorting Marxism, Benedetto Croce, had declared in 1912 that history was that which "one really thinks in the act of thinking . . . principally an act of thought". Another well known historian, academic and Cabinet Minister in my day, H.A.L. Fisher, confessed in his *History of Europe* in 1936 that he could see no "pattern" in history, only "one emergency following upon another . . . the play of the contingent and the unforeseen".

I need hardly point out to you that all this only meant that there are as many ways of understanding history as there are people to think about it. Very similar, more than forty years after Croce, was the opinion of an American historian, Carl Becker, who laid it down in 1955 that "the historical fact is in someone's mind or it is nowhere", and that it is not the event which is the historical fact, but the historian's "affirmation about the event".

Professor Karl Popper — well known for the last forty years as a convert from Marxism to violent anti-Marxism — declared in 1950 that "there can be no history of the past as it actually did happen: there can only be historical interpretations . . . which should answer a need arising out of the practical problems and decisions which face us . . . History, in the sense in which most people speak of it, simply does not exist".

I could go on with other examples of this way of thinking about history. What is common to all of them is that they give up — no, they even condemn — any attempt to understand history. Pick out events, or what someone has said were events, out of a vast kaleidoscope: arrange them in a pretty or ugly pattern to suit yourself, as you will: and of course put them — or your thoughts about them — into a book which publishers probably will accept, for good and sufficient reasons which will maybe occur to this particular audience.

But I would like to point out that Henry Ford, with whose simple dismissal of any explanations of history we started, and the great firm which bears his name (like other automobile manufacturers in the capitalist world) certainly had, and still has, "practical problems and decisions" to face, which have always been complicated when their workers act, consciously or unconsciously, against what Professor Popper often calls "the open society" — a society which he has more than once made clear means one based on capitalism.



There are other historians who feel just as helpless when faced with the problem of seeing a pattern in history, but can't get away from the idea that all the same some such pattern exists. For them some universal spirit or God behind it all comes to the rescue. Once again I will point to some of the best-known modern writers.

Thus the German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey arrived at the conclusion in 1903 that there are at least three views of the world dominant in our day — that which makes the world based primarily on matter: that which makes the world depend on idealism in human nature: and that which simply proclaims "a spiritual divine power" living both in nature and in individuals. Each was true in its own one-sided way: but what the whole truth was "is denied to us", because each expresses "one aspect of the whole universe".

Those of you who remember or have read about the defence of the Spanish Republic in the years 1936-1939 may recall the name of Jacques Maritain, the French Catholic philosopher who went against the princes of his own Church by backing the Republic against the fascists. Concerned with the same problem over Ethiopia, he came to the conclusion in 1935 that it was a case of the universal, i.e. God, in dispute with the mankind whom he has brought into being: "History is an unimaginable drama between individuals and abused freedoms, between the eternal divine personality and our own personalities which have been created".

Or again there is a much-revered British historian, Professor Barraclough, who in 1956 wrote that because, at every great turning point in human history, "the fortuitous and the unforeseen, the dynamic and the revolutionary" has broken through the continuous process of evolution, we have to reconsider the very foundations of historical thought about past events. And very cautiously, but all the same unmistakably, he recommends us to turn back to the view of the Prussian 19th century historian Ranke that "every epoch is immediate to God . . . all generations of humanity appear before God as having equal right, and this is the way in which the historian also must look at the matter".

Very likely some of my audience will by now be thinking with melancholy of the words of Marx which we put on his monument at Highgate Cemetery: "The philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways: the point however is to change it".

All I can ask you for is a little more patience. There are still some of those interpretations to clear out of the way before we can begin really to understand history. You will recognise quite easily I think which of them represent a re-wording of those which I have already quoted, perhaps with a spice of original fantasy added. But what nearly all insist on is that it is the mind of the writer that makes history, without explaining what made the writer think that way.

The classic in this field is that strange genius, Samuel Butler, who said in 1901: "Though God cannot alter the past, the historian can". This may sound merely sarcastic: but he struck a responsive note. The most influential American philosopher, John Dewey, said in 1938 that history consists of a mass of "strains" — peoples, dynasties, political, ecclesiastical, economic, art, science, philosophy and so forth — which have to be "woven together" in order to produce what he called "a comprehensive strand" — and that can only be done if the historian decides beforehand what is his conception of "the direction of movement".

Recent years have produced an increasing number of such would-be explanations. Thus a West German historian Lessing, writing in 1962, said that history is only the historian imparting some meaning, in the light of his own ideals, to "the meaningless".

Another West German, Stern, wrote in 1967 that every epoch and all world history can appear as the history of ideas, or cultures, or great personalities or classes, or the struggle of good against evil, intelligence against ignorance, individual against society — and it is up to the historian to choose, "according to the system of values which dominates his thoughts". (I quote these extracts from an excellent survey in "Modern and Contemporary History", Moscow, July 1978). There is a Canadian, Dray, who argued in 1964 that, as values (ethics, morals) are part of history, it's no use the historian striving for any objective truth in his work.

None of these writers (with one exception which I shall mention later) or those akin to them — for example, the Oxford historian Isaiah Berlin, whose vast deluge of words in his "Historical Inevitability" I spare you, because they only serve to bewilder, while in fact revealing when read carefully his fundamental agreement with the writers I have quoted — none of them attempt seriously to enquire where the conceptions, ideals, values, morals, etc. come from.

Before I go on to the exception I have just mentioned, and in fact try to tackle the real road to understanding history, there are two famous writers whom you may justifiably be expecting me to mention. One is Thomas Carlyle, who proclaimed in his essay on "Heroes and Hero-worship" in 1841 that "the history of the world is but the biography of great men", or alternatively that it is "the essence of innumerable biographies". Moreover he gave brilliant examples of his idea in a number of notable books. But like all the others I have mentioned, he did not explain why his heroes came to have such biographies, or why their contemporaries were in such a frame of mind as to be influenced by them, this way or that.

The other is our own contemporary, Professor Arnold Toynbee, author of "A Study of History" in ten large volumes. Toynbee departed from the usual practice of writing the history of one nation or one institution. Instead, he traced in the present or the past a number of groups of nations, which he called "societies". Here are some of them: "Western Christendom", "Orthodox Christianity", "Islamic", "Hindu", "Far Eastern".

In addition there are a number of societies also grouped quietly according to religions, but also constituted as what we recognise as separate nations or nationalities, in the present or past (like "Hellenic", or some of the African peoples). Moreover — and this is the more important from our point of view today — Toynbee claimed to trace in each case the same broad pattern of rise and fall as in the life of an individual: infancy, youth, maturity, decline, death.

Apart from the factual difficulties which consequently arise even in his most learned volumes, Toynbee does not, any more than the others, give any clue as to why this life-cycle occurs in the nations or societies — except in some law coming from God, which indeed you might expect from the titles he has given them. And where God steps in, it is no use looking for any reliable or rational key to the understanding of history.

Nevertheless, and in spite of all I have said, there have been for many years attempts to find such a rational key. At first it was the isolated attempt of one man of genius — and a religious man at that.

J.B. Vico, an Italian lawyer and philosopher, lived from 1668 to 1744. It was a time when Italy was divided into petty feudal states, and feudal ideas dominated the people, with the backing of the petrifying influence of a degraded Catholic Church. In Naples, where Vico lived most of his life, corruption and oppression of every kind were rampant, and poverty among the mass of the people widespread. Vico talked, as everyone had to at the time, in religious language, doing his utmost to show himself a good Catholic. But the ideas he put forward went far beyond those accepted by the ruling class or the Church.

In his book, **The One Principle and Purpose of Universal Law** he wrote that mankind had never lived as a mass of individuals: men, both in body and in mind, could never have lived otherwise than in society, whether merely to preserve life or to procure "those things which will enrich existence, refine intellect and perfect the soul". Even law came not from some divine inspiration or command, but from mankind's "interests and necessities". And it was differences over those interests which brought changes in society: "until all natural rights are fully enjoyed by all, the sense of wrong felt by some must give rise to civil strife and the struggle of class with class", he said.



True, behind this process there was an all-pervading spirit of Reason (spelt with a capital letter): it extended to all Nature, it also governed history. Classes and nations as well as individuals were its "instruments". This was his concession to religion — but it was a concession which, I think you will agree, while taking God for granted, nevertheless made mankind, its problems, its classes fighting with a "sense of wrong", the central fact and motive force of history in practice. Even such everyday things as the army, trade and government were due to laws, he said, produced by "the greed, ambition and ferocity of mankind" — that is of the struggle and strife of its classes.

This was a very different explanation from all those I have quoted to you so far. And just because Italy in its enfeebled state was no longer a source of inspiration to Europe as it had been in the 15th and 16th centuries, Vico's voice for long remained that of one crying in the wilderness, outside his own country — and not fully understood there.

Quite otherwise was the fate of philosophical rebels against God's domination in France, in the second half of the 18th century. Helvetius, Holbach, Diderot were contemporaries of another great anti-clerical thinker, the English historian Edward Gibbon. But unlike him, they went the whole road to atheism in their determination to find a rational explanation of the history of mankind.

It was reason, ideas which governed the world: but these ideas (as the political philosopher John Locke had asserted after the English Revolution of the 17th century) were determined by man's environment, not inborn or sent from God. To give mankind a better future, it was necessary to change its environment and educate it. This meant a political change, changing the material conditions under which mankind lived. So far they were materialists: but how the change was to happen they could not explain.

At this point, those of you who took my advice and dipped into the book by Plekhanov, the founder of Marxism in Russia, on the development of the monist or materialist conception of history (1895) will recognise that I am following in very brief outline the account which he gives.

The great French Revolution, which was the embodiment of all possible horrors according to the French aristocrats and British reactionaries, was attributed by them to the influence of those same materialist philosophers. In reaction against their ideas there arose in the early 19th century a school of historians in France — Guizot and Thierry (both of whom wrote important works on English history as well), Mignet (a historian of the French Revolution) — who denied that it was environment which determined mankind's history. They would not go back to the explanation that it was opinions which were decisive: the recent history of France and all Europe was too sharp a disproof of that. They came to the conclusion that it was the form of government which was decisive — and governments were the reflection of property relations and class struggles, finding their embodiment in the laws by which governments rule.

Here as you see they came back very close to Vico. But like him they did not pretend to know what were the causes of changes in property relations themselves, or therefore, of the class struggles which had occurred in history.

Contemporary with them, but seeking an explanation of just that, there came the Utopian Socialists — Saint-Simon and Fourier in France Robert Owen in Britain, Weitling in Germany. They recognised the historic role of property relations and class struggles, like the French historians of their own day: they wanted to see a better future for mankind, like the 19th century French materialists. But they were idealists, believing in the overwhelming power of reason embodied in human nature.

Appealing to this reason, they constructed out of their imagination pictures of an improved or ideal system of society. And all they could do to bring this about was to appeal also to all sections of society existing in their own day — capitalists as well as workers — to abandon the short-sighted conceptions of their own selfish interests, and to accept the ideal which would satisfy everyone. You can find a summary of their views in the third chapter of Marx and Engels' **Communist Manifesto**: Plekhanov gives an even fuller and very acute analysis in his book.

Fourthly, in reaction against what Plekhanov calls "the impotence of French materialism in face of the question of evolution in nature and history", an outstanding German philosopher Hegel, in the first half of the 19th century, took his stand on the principle that not only ideas, but all man's history and Nature itself had evolved and developed. But this development had proceeded through inner contradictions or dialectics, through the struggle implanted in the very nature of all phenomena and events, the new born within the old and superseding it. "Contradiction moves things forward", was Hegel's formula.

Moreover, this dialectical or inner-contradictory development was not of a uniformly steady slow character: the elements of contradiction in society **accumulated** slowly, but in the end their quantity became overpowering, they burst through the framework of the old, development from the old to the new took the form of a leap — or in other words, quantity turned into quality. All man's history showed this. Thus Hegel's conception meant a really revolutionary breakaway from all its predecessors.

But Hegel and his followers, all the same, were idealists. Ideas were primary, they insisted. They could not accept what to them was the destructive nature of the materialism which they knew. To reconcile the conception of contradiction in actual observable history with his own idealist views, Hegel concluded that behind it all was an Absolute Idea, Absolute Reason, working itself out (Vico's idea again) through those very contradictions. Moreover, each nation had its own Absolute Idea — and in Germany the national Absolute Idea had produced the Prussian military monarchy, of which Hegel was a loyal defender.

Hegel's view had a profound and far-reaching influence in Europe. The German historian Mommsen accepted them in his **Roman History**, the Russian historian Solovyov in his **History of Russia** — each in his own way coming to the conclusion that the triumph of Caesarism in ancient Rome, and of Tsarist autocracy in modern Russia, was the fruition of the appropriate national Idea.

Furthermore, the conception could also take Liberal and democratic forms, for dedicated historians in the conditions of mid-19th century England and America. Grote's **History of Greece** (1856), which glorified the working-out of ancient city democracy: Motley's **Rise of the Dutch Republic** (1856), which did the same for the idea of national freedom, fighting against alien military rule in the 16th century: John Richard Green's **Short History of the English People** (1874), describing the latter's "noble idea of freedom" working out in its history (I use the description by his widow, Alice Stopford Green, herself a historian) — were all inspired by the same idealist understanding of history.

As one more illustration on how far another and more lasting aspect of Hegel's ideas went, I may give the example of a Swiss historian and philosopher who in his time had a European influence, and is still spoken of with respect. This was Jacob Burckhardt, who in 1871 published a rather pessimistic work, **Fortune and Misfortune in History**.

In this he rejected the idea both of morals governing history and that there was any real meaning in the idea of progress, contrasting the disasters which mankind had suffered at its own hands as the price of any supposed progress. But in the course of his reactionary thought Burckhardt made interesting remarks which, in someone else's hands, would have given a different meaning to his survey.



Commenting on the violence which was used at the end of the Middle Ages by both the governments supporting the Reformation, "whose heart was in the property of the Church rather than in religion" — and those governments who fought them, and ultimately carried out a Counter-Reformation, he wrote: "Yet in struggle and in struggle alone, and not in printed polemics, does the full complete life develop that must come of religious warfare . . . only through struggle, at all times and in all questions of world history, does mankind realise what it really wants and what it can really achieve".

So far he followed Hegel; but like Vico he took the struggles a stage further, indicating not very obscurely that they were the foundation of law itself, once they were successful: "Every successful act of violence is evil . . . But when that act was the foundation of power, it was followed by the indefatigable efforts of men to turn mere power into law and order. With their healthy strength, they set to work to cure the State of violence". However, Burckhardt did not go so far as Vico in identifying this picture with the class struggle, perhaps just because 1871 was the year in which the class struggle in neighbouring France reached its highest point in the Paris Commune.

But coming back to Hegel's own time, neither the Prussian nor Russian absolute monarchy with their military and police dictatorship, nor the noble ideal of English freedom rooted in the worst excesses of British capitalism at home and of colonial plunder and massacre in India and elsewhere, at the very time Green was writing, were satisfactory examples of how to understand history as a whole — especially for people who were not attracted by these questionable national ideals, who were materialists themselves, and who were aware of the real world as it existed in their own day.

Marx and Engels were not starting in this respect from a blank page drawn out of their own imagination. On the contrary, they had studied and worked over, and even to some extent lived through, that entire series of different ways of interpreting history since the beginning of the 18th century which Plekhanov later traced in his book. Nor was that study all they had had to carry out. Their writings, and particularly Marx's notebooks, bear witness to an enormous independent reading of their own in the histories of many countries (including colonial history).

Both men, as you doubtless know, carried on an immense study of political economy, both in theory and as presented in the capitalism of their own day — most advanced in Britain, far behind but still established at different stages in France, Germany, the United States, just beginning in Russia, India and elsewhere. All the same, the critical examination they made of those earlier schools of thought which I have mentioned was of first-class importance; and Plekhanov made brilliant use of it in putting Marxism firmly on its feet in Russia. It might even contribute something to the same end in Britain: who knows?

One thing can be said here, that you will find embedded in one or other of those previous schools of thought most, if not all, of the ideas of much more modern writers of our own time which I mentioned earlier in this lecture.

Marx and Engels had both begun as followers of Hegel. Here I will quote a few sentences from Engels' words on that subject, written in 1859: "What distinguished Hegel's mode of thought from that of all other philosophers was the tremendous sense of the historical upon which it is based. Abstract and idealist though it was in form, yet the development of his thought always proceeded parallel with the development of world history: and the latter is really meant to be only the test of the former . . . Hegel was the first who attempted to show a development, an inner coherence, in history . . . This epoch-making conception of history was the direct theoretical premise for the new materialist outlook".

Engels said however that in Hegel's writing the real relation between world history and the development of ideas was "inverted and stood on its head". What Marx had done was to turn Hegel's idea back upon its feet, to extract "the kernel which comprises Hegel's real discoveries in this sphere, and to construct the dialectical method divested of its ideological trappings".



Now let us turn to what Marx himself said about this "kernel". It is in that preface to "A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy" which I recommend in the preliminary reading list, and which Marx also published in 1859 (Engels' article which I have just quoted was in fact written as part of a series in a German weekly, published in London, popularising Marx's work). Here are Marx's words:

"In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum-total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life-process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but on the contrary their social being that determines their consciousness.

"At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production, or — what is but a legal expression for the same thing — with the property relations within which they have been at work hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces, these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an epoch of social revolution. With the change of the economic foundation, the entire immense super-structure is more or less rapidly transformed.

"In considering such transformations, a distinction should always be made between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophical — in short ideological — forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out".

I need hardly tell you that today there are hundreds of historical works written in the Socialist countries, and not a few in the countries still ruled by capitalism, which have been composed in the spirit of these words of Marx.

At the same time it is only fair to point out that more than one of the modern writers to whom I referred earlier in this lecture — and quite a number of others — have in their writings used the occasion to present a travesty — in some cases a malignant travesty — of the Marxist understanding of history. Most of them are far from original, as you will see if you will read the relevant chapters of Plekhanov's book. Here are a few.

Charles A Beard, the well-known historian of American capitalism, wrote in 1934 that Marx went "further than any other" in setting out "the fullness of history . . . in determinate order": in other words that Marx teaches history as something at each stage pre-determined, over which men have no control. Karl Popper, in 1950, wrote of Marxism even more simply: it meant, he said, "the worship of success".

Another American, the religious historian, Reinhold Niebuhr, wrote in 1953 that Marxism's idea is that the defeat of capitalism "will mean the destruction of evil in history". Isaiah Berlin, in 1954, wrote that according to Marxist morality, "to understand all is to see that nothing could be otherwise that it is", and that personal freedom "is a necessary deception". What all these and similar pronouncements mean is that according to Marx and Marxism everything is predetermined and morality means nothing.

Such ideas were already peddled in Marx and Engels' own times. Plekhanov deals with them trenchantly, refuting Marx's Russian critics. But Engels had already discussed them in a series of letters which were not available to Plekhanov. You will find them in the **Selected Correspondence of Marx and Engels**.

Thus in his letter to Bloch (21 September 1890) Engels wrote: "According to the materialist conception of history the determining element in history is ultimately production and reproduction in real life. More than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted. If therefore somebody twists this into the statement that the economic element is the only determining one, he transforms it into a meaningless, abstract and absurd phrase.

"The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure — political forms of the class struggle and its consequences, constitutions established by the victorious class after a successful battle, etc., forms of law — then even the reflexes of all these actual struggles in the brains of the combatants — political, legal, philosophical theories, religious ideas and their further development into systems of dogma — also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggles, and in many cases preponderate in determining their form . . . From the fact that individual wills — of which each desires what he is impelled to by his physical constitution and external, in the last resort economic, circumstances (either his own personal circumstances or those of society in general) — do not attain what they want, but are merged into a collective mean, a common resultant, it must not be concluded that their value equals 0. On the contrary, each contributes to the resultant, and is to this degree involved in it".

In another letter to Conrad Schmidt the same year, Engels dealt with the reaction of the State and law upon the economic foundations of a particular stage of society, as well as the reaction of philosophy, religion and political ideas. "The whole vast process goes on in the form of interaction (though of very unequal forces, the economic movement being by far the strongest, most elemental and most decisive)", wrote Engels. "Or why do we fight for the political dictatorship of the proletariat, if political power is economically impotent", he asked sarcastically.

And in one more letter, this time to the Marxist historian Franz Mehring, in July, 1893, Engels said that Marx and he were bound at first to lay emphasis on the derivation of political and other notions from the basic economic facts: but in so doing they neglected the formal side, namely, how those notions come about. He dealt at some length with this, and with the handle which it had given to their adversaries, concluding: "Hanging together with this too is the fatuous notion of the ideologists that because we deny an independent historical development to the various ideological spheres which play a part in history, we also deny them any effect upon history. The basis of this is the common undialectical conception of cause and effect as rigidly opposite poles, the total disregarding of interaction. These gentlemen often almost deliberately forget that once an historic element has been brought into the world by other elements, ultimately by economic facts, it also reacts in its turn, and may react upon its environment and even upon its own causes".

In this respect Marx's letter of July 27 1871 to his friend Kugelmann, after the Paris Commune, is of particular interest: "Up till now it has been thought that the growth of the Christian myths during the Roman Empire was possible only because printing was not yet invented. Precisely the contrary. The daily press and the telegraph, which in a moment spreads inventions over the whole earth, fabricate more myths (and the bourgeois cattle believe and enlarge upon them) in one day than could formerly have been done in a century". Of course, today we have the radio and the TV to do the job even faster.

I believe that if you look round upon the world as you may have read about it during the last five or six days, darkly through a glass it may be owing to the character of our newspapers or the BBC, you will realise the full force of those remarks by Engels.



## Sources

- J A Froude, "Short Studies on Great Subjects" (1894)
- A Birrell, "Obiter Dicta. Carlyle" (1884)
- B Croce, "History, its Theory and Practice" (1912)
- H A L Fisher, "A History of Europe" (1936)
- Carl Becker, "What are Historical Facts?" (Western Political Quarterly, 1955)
- K Popper, "The Open Society and its Enemies" (1950)
- W Dilthey, "The Dream" (1903)
- J Maritain, "Science and Wisdom" (1935)
- G Barraclough, "History in a Changing World" (1956)
- K Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach" (1845)
- S Butler, "Eve when Revisted" (1901)
- J Dewey, "Logic, Theory of Inquiry" (1938)
- T Lessing, "History as Imparting Meaning to the Meaningless" (Hamburg 1962) In German
- A Stern, "The Philosophy of History and the Problem of Values" (Munich 1967) In German
- W Dray, "Philosophy of History" (Toronto 1964)
- I Berlin, "Historical Inevitability" (1954)
- T Carlyle, "Heroes and Hero-Worship" (1841)
- A Toynbee, "A Study of History" (1935-1955)
- J B Vico, "The One Principle and Purpose of Universal Law" (1720)
- G Plekhanov, "In Defence of Materialism" (English translation 1947)
- F Engels, "Karl Marx. A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy" (1859)
- K Marx, "Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy" (1859)
- C Beard, "Written History as an Act of Faith" (American Historical Review 1934)
- R Niebuhr, "The Nature and Destiny of Man" (1953)

SURREY DISTRICT C.P.G.B.  
188 High St. Colliers Wood  
SW19 2BN Tel. 01-542 4833